

INTERVIEW MISHA ALPERIN FOR US- NEW YORK NEWSPAPER

1 During my study as a classical pianist I started to play at moldavian weddings every Saturday as a way to earn money, and to survive. Surprisingly enough we had to play at these weddings not only folk music, but everything from the Beatles and Stevie Wonder to Abba and Elvis Presley. Already at that time I understood that moldavian/romanian folk music is an unseperated part of the eastern and oriental tradition. As well as klezmer music.

Because of the very heavy and almost surrealistic movie-like circumstances at the weddings my relation with moldavian folk music was not so close at it became later when I moved to Russia. Only then I started to appreciate moldavian folk music.

To be a musician at the folk wedding meant 30 to 40 hours of playing outside in the cold open air, with just a few breaks, and 2 hours of sleep. With drunk, quarreling people around you and up tempo Balkan folkdances on the 7/8, 9, 11 or 13/8.

As well we had to play the repertoire of thousands of songs and dances on the spot, without any rehearsal. Most of the music I never heard before. For a classical musician this an enormous challenge, and sometimes it was very stressful. But it was an incredible school for playing with different musicians every time. It reminds of the jazz experience in the old times in the USA, where most of the learning schools were in the jazz clubs.

2. I also played at Jewish weddings in Moldavia. I always had mixed feelings about this music. I have a different way of expressing sadness and joy through the sound than most of the Jewish songs I heard. Its difficult for me to explain exactly what this difference is, maybe I found most of the Jewish music too tragi-comical as is all of our history. Later this difference became even bigger. The Russian and Norwegian folk music helped me to look at my own Jewish roots from a distance, with the bird's eye perspective. For me my roots means much more than being Jewish or Moldavian. The first time I entered an Indian restaurant in Oslo, many years ago, the smell of basmati rice and incense as well as the music from the speakers made me cry. It felt like I came back home. But I guess I am not Indian. In fact I don't believe to any nations. I believe all folk traditions belong to the same family and I wish to break down borders between epochs. All my projects as a composer and what I did in and after Moldavia were about that, including Bulgarian Voices Angelite with Hun-Huur-Tu, Moscow Art Trio and Double Dream with Mikhail Rudy with a repertoire of classical and contemporary music and improvisations.

3. The influence of Moldavian music on my music today - if it happens – happens only unconsciously. What I am occupied with mostly today is to be honest and as empty as possible. And to create stories which are dramaturgically clear and leave space for the fantasy of the listeners.

4. Moscow in the early 80's was very snobbish. At the same time it was one of the most cultural places of Russia. To be there as a young musician from the province was not easy. Especially for me because I refused to play American jazz. The whole jazz scene signalized that American jazz was almost the only language accepted outside of the classical world. To play music of Duke Ellington and Bill Evans was the passport to the jazz world of Russia at that time. I was a rebel and as a rebel I felt lonely but also proud. Proud to be able to do my own things. Unfortunately the situation in Russian jazz is still almost the same. Of course Russia has several talented musicians, but it will take lots of

time until the discovery of their own roots will have priority. Here in Norway the situation is very different.

5. In 1986 I was part of a group of musicians in Moscow who reopened the jazz club Blue Bird. We played there every night for free. It was an important time for me to try out compositions, with new partners like Arkady Shilkloper. One day a Norwegian journalist, Isak Rogde, visited our club and made amateur recordings of my music. That led to an invitation by the Vossa Jazz festival (Norway) in 1989. When we were there, we got the spontaneous idea to visit the legendary Rainbow Studio in Oslo, known for the ECM Recordings. Jan Erik Kongshaug, sound engineer of this studio, gave the small recording of our visit to Manfred Eicher of ECM. Our first ECM recording – Wave of Sorrow – became a fact and continued tours in Norway followed. In 1993 I got a contract with the Norwegian Academy of music in Oslo as a professor of piano improvisation and composition and then I moved here with my daughter Ksenia.
6. Yes. Norwegian and Norway have naturally inspired me. Sometimes I feel more a Nordic person than a south person. This has to do with my life here by the Oslo fjord the last 15 years. Where the silence and unpredictable weather, the space and the richness of the light inspire me to compose and to be more introvert and meditative.

Many composers are of course inspired by folk music. Not only eastern European composers. And this is not strange. Folk music has something that we are missing in the cities: nakedness and purity. Folk music was never born, that's why it will never die. Folk music will never contain apathy and depression, which is something you can often hear in city music. That's why I am naturally inspired by folk music. It makes me feel relaxed and content.

7/8 You cannot find the border between day and night, but the difference between them is obvious. This words of the Indian master Osho I can say now when you are asking me about the difference between composition and improvisation in my work. In my opinion if you hear the difference between composition and improvisation, the wholeness is gone. If you don't this means organic unity is there. It's the same with the different music languages: jazz, folk and classic for me.

Music is always connected to the personal imagination of beauty. I am growing, I am changing and my imagination of beauty is also changing. What was beautiful for me today is not necessarily beautiful tomorrow.

Misha Alperin & Moscow Art Trio release their CDs on JARO records

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